THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

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Literature Now

In a time of general change it is the steady, quiet, continuing activity that may be misunderstood. The innovation has the advantage of having been set up for the times and of not being asked to meet the test of time. It satisfies if it but show quick results. This is good, because in a year like this the shortest way within our code to military victory is a prime objective. It is so essential and the effective age of a soldier is now so low that college training is often swung around into a short cut to induction, so short that in the government and out of it people have wondered whether we might not be faced in post-war years with a "lost generation," a gap in the hitherto steady procession of trained and educated men who make their contributions to civilization.

This fear is not as prevalent now as it was when the present school year opened. People are still enrolled in college programs which are not directed toward immediate military ends. Young people, for one valid reason or another, will in reduced numbers continue throughout the war to carry on in the tradition of liberal education, and will sometimes find time for the process of acquiring culture. It is a process. There are processes, known in the sciences and less obvious in the arts, that cannot be speeded up but from which results come in their time, even come sometimes as secondary products. It is clear now that we shall not suffer a total interruption of these processes any more than Britain has suffered total interruption of university life while bombs have shaken the very colleges. Occupied and starved countries may have a lost generation as a result of the war. The axis nations may have a mis-educated generation too fixed in ruthlessness to be de-educated afterward. But our culture is a tenacious thing, and even total war will not kill its spirit. While we are having short courses for war purposes, we shall also be having education for purposes of peace, longer courses in the hope that peace will last longer than war.

That may be the very reason now for studying the literature of your native language. There is still no better way to understand the tradition behind you and the ideals ahead of you than through these documents which are subtly permeated with our way of thought. This literature is no propaganda; it is a vital record of people, recorded for us in our language. It was not written because men and women saw the beauty and knew the ugliness of our way of life and could not keep quiet in the presence of those things. It was written so that men might enjoy reading it and might themselves begin thinking. In contrast, has a single thing been written by a Nazi in order to be enjoyed or in order to initiate independent thought? If we are to be educated rather than trained, we cannot leave out this element. If literature is used for immediate indoctrination, it is abused. If it leads to ultimate understanding while its immediate end is information, it is rightly used in a college survey course.

We do not forget, of course, that the required study of literature may confer the mark of education on a person. The well turned phrases that have come into our stock of language will not be meaningless to us. Common allusions will strike responses within us that will be sources of delight. Appreciations will be aroused that will give us pleasure in time to come. Even required literature may give us these marks of cultivation. Other things such as trained reading ability and improved insight will have present use in military life. Armies look for men who can send or comprehend a written report that is clear. There are, then, ultimate and immediate values to be hoped for.

But there is also one great problem of the future that appreciation of your own literature may help solve. For a quarter century, and with Machiavellian cunning, the totalitarian leaders have raised up a generation grounded and hardened in the idea that their way of life is as right as it is ruthless. After the peace they will be a numerous body of young people in the world. There will be millions of them, healthy and fanatical. They will have had a taste of power, and they will be unreformed by a defeat that will but rankle within them. They will be your contemporaries; and in the region of ideas—an area not disposed of by peace treaties—they wil be your adversaries. You can meet ideas only with ideas. Your understanding of your culture and tradition must be as well grounded as is their fanatical attachment to their ideas. There is no short cut, no quick propagandizing, no set of slogans that will meet the problem you will face. Advertising won't do it this time. Ingrained ideas and deep understanding must be brought face to face with ingrained ideology and deep resentment. We have the ideas; but if we hold them superficially, foreign ideologies may still infiltrate into our society even after the war is ended. The slow process of acquiring culture has been useful in all generations. It is indispensable for yours, for when your culture is at war it needs enrichment.

—Raymond Adams
The Univ. of No. Carolina.

Post-War English

(Editor's note: This is the first of a series of letters from administrators and others, on the subject of College English after the war.)

My dear Editor:

First, I hope that college teachers of English will continue to do the job they are now doing, which I take to be primarily the forming of taste and the development of appreciation and understanding. I should hope further that in carrying on this present activity some of the narrow specialization now common might be jettisoned. Too often college students are prevented from getting a glimpse of the woods because of their study of individual trees, even twigs and leaves.

Second, I hope that English teachers will realize that if we are to gain anything like an international point of view in literature, it will have to be done through the English departments. As we now make a gesture toward the classics and European literature in something we call "comparative" literature, I should think we would do well to widen our horizons to include the literatures of India, China and Japan in Asia, of Brazil, particularly in South America, and of Russia and some of the Balkan states in Europe.

If I were a young man in college today looking forward to a career teaching literature, I should take my doctor's degree in English in one of the good graduate schools in the United States, making as adequate a study of linguistics at the same time as I could. I should then go to Japan for three or four years, learning the language and translating the literature; next to China for the same length of time and occupying myself in the same way; and then to India, repeating the procedure. By that time I should hope to find a post in the United States where I could teach the literature and culture and civlization of these three Asiatic countries—unless by that time I should be old enough to be retired!

I believe all disciplines in American colleges will be enriched after the war. I can, however, imagine no one subject which will have greater opportunities before it than the teaching of literature.

—Addison Hibbard, Dean,
Northwestern Univ.

Why Are We Under Fire?

Hush! Let no faculty member outside the department of English catch a word of this. Here are a few reasons why many, too many, of the public and the educational world do not favor English.

Many of us—not you yourself, of course! but plenty of persons I could name—are like irritatingly obstinate salesmen who act as if they were trying to corner the market for a tawdry useless spurious antique.

Some of us affect the cheapest of collegiate or other slang in the tiresome effort to attract gay morons. The class dutifully laugh, but they decide that, if the life-long study of English can not give more distinction to an instructor's speech, such a subject is not worth their time. Some of us go to the other extreme and quote literature ad nauseam as if we had no ideas of our own or could express them only in shreds of Shelley or Shakespeare. Some of us haggle about hair-splitting distinctions in usage or pronunciation, or turn any honest discussion of ideals into an exercise in semantics sleuthing. Some of us are so afraid that we shall not be impressively professional that we never commit ourelves to a definite belief and never answer a question directly. In short, are all of us cultured straight-forward human beings, instead of mere foot-note mongers?

Some of us are selfish toward other departments. If our favorite A student in composition prefers to major in chemistry, let us be glad that a future chemist will write lucid brilliant reports, rather than be grumpy that we have lost a shining light. If our most intelligent interpreter of literature prefers to specialize in French rather than in English, let us investigate how our colleagues teach French literature, and let us read more of the French literature itself until we discover the secret of the attractiveness in our competitors' courses.

If the foreign language department demonstrates that our freshman composition course turns out students who don't know a pronoun from a noun, let us not remark through up-tilted nose that parts of speech are no province of our mighty realm; but let us see that our class periods are utilized efficiently enough to add the fundamentals of grammar, whether our textbooks or our chairman include them or not.

Nowadays we cannot expect many out of the vast college population to be attracted to the offerings of the usual English department, such courses as the history of the English novel, the Elizabethan non-

(Continued on Page Four)

THE NEWS LETTER

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Editorial

The National Council of Teachers of English has launched another NEWS LETTER upon the educational world through its Committee on Comparative Literature. Vol. I, No. 2 is before us, and is an eight-page publication, mimeographed. It follows the editorial policy of the CEA NEWS LETTER in that it apparently favors brief communications. The subscription price is $1.00 per year. While we regret the confusion which is sure to result from a duplication of title in a world full of titles and in a field so close to our own, yet we welcome this god-child to the prolific, plethoric procession of pedagogical publications.

The constitution of the CEA, adopted at the annual meeting in December, 1939, provided for a "Board of nine directors chosen from the membership and serving for three years or until their successors are elected." Three retire from office each year.

A year ago the Nominating Committee recommended that the retiring president should become a director for three years so that the association might avail itself of his wisdom and experience; and they thereupon proceeded to nominate the then retiring President as a director. This would have been quite regular, if they had nominated only two other directors for that term, but they nominated three in addition to the retiring President and all four were elected and their names put at the head of this column.

It is evidently the wish of the association that each retiring President shall serve as a director for the following three years, but it has not approved the implied suggestion that we have twelve directors instead of nine, three of them being past presidents. So this amendment to our constitution will be properly phrased and transmitted to the membership for action. If any group desires at this time to take advantage of our constitutional device and propose other legislation or action by the membership at large on the same ballot, the opportunity is presented.

The NEWS LETTER has from time to time published examples of "teacher English" and in this issue there is a letter from the Dean of the Harvard Law School, commenting upon "legal English". We wish that some informed member would send us comments upon the prevailing English of broadcasters. It is our impression that even before the emergency of war drew trained announcers from their tasks and replaced them with inexperienced young men and women, these standards of oral English were not being well maintained. We have listened for some time, for instance, to the excellent news comments coming to us over the Blue Network from a commentator of high repute who regularly offends our ears by pronouncing "coupon" as though the first syllable were "queue", and with equal regularity talks about "athaletics".

Not long ago we were startled by a reference to the dragons in the opera "Carmen". We had not recalled any fabulous beasts in that opera and suddenly realized, after a third reference to them, that the announcer meant "dragoons". Our students are entering this vocation and their training must come from English classrooms. Let us hope that their broadcasting redounds to our credit.

Gleaned From the Mail

You might look up a short essay by Hazlett on "Classical Education". It is in the volume called "The Round Table". I have seldom seen a better explanation of the claims of what we call the liberal education. In fact, you might reprint it as a Chap Book or at least use excerpts for your columns.

—Robert Gay
Simmons College

The amusing story of Salis, the ancient mariner, which appeared in an earlier issue of the "News Letter" brought back a twenty-year-old memory of a history professor who once referred to "Adam, the venerable Bede."

—W. L. Werner
State College, Pennsylvania

In forwarding my check for membership in the Association I wish to express my appreciation of the work which the officers and editors have undertaken in our common interests. The sending of sample copies is especially valuable, as I am sure the organization and its publication command attention and response far wider than the paid membership would indicate.

University of Idaho
—William Carr Banks

Legal English

In response to your letter of February 18 let me say that most of the members of our faculty try to impress upon law students the desirability of using clear and precise English. At the same time, however, we have to call their attention to the fact that certain expressions have received judicial approval as expressing certain legal concepts and when used in certain documents create definite legal relations. We explain in this way the use of much repetitious legal verbiage.

In the case which you state, the word "predecease" is frequently if not generally used. It is nonsense, however, to insist that a will which used "die before I do" in place of "predecease me" would not be interpreted so as to carry out the expressed intention of the testator. It is doubtless true that most lawyers will never use one word where four or five will do the same work. They never speak of a man's reputation for truth but for truth and veracity. They never speak of conveying real estate but of granting, bargaining, selling and conveying. In dealing with a technical subject every careful lawyer will use the technical phrases which the courts in his jurisdiction have aready interpreted. In other matters, however, sensible lawyers use the simplest language. In drafting a legal document a careful lawyer does not try to produce a literary masterpiece, except so far as simplicity marks a masterpiece. He will use the simplest sentences with the most accurate words, and he will not hesitate to repeat rather than to paraphrase.

Most of the nonsensical phraseology in common law indictments has been done away with. The same is true in civil pleadings in most jurisdictions. Of course there are a lot of lawyers trained in the early tradition, and it is almost impossible to induce them to change.

—E. M. Morgan, Acting Dean,
Harvard University Law School

Teacher English

"Unless the school reaches down into the substratum of society and taps the deep flowing currents of social life, it can only be another pedagogical experiment of interest to the academician, but destined for an early grave."

—Readings in the Philosophy of Education.

"The boy kept it up his intellectual sleeve until his side was ready for the final blow in the rebuttal, when he stole up to his best debater who sprung it as a surprise and won the debate."

—H. L. Miller—Creative Learning and Teaching.

"There are 42 definitions of the activity school in the appendix (of the N.S.S.E. yearbook) and none of them are definite enough to enable an observer to identify such a school when he sees one."

—Educational Administration and Supervision.

"What the schools need to get at is a constellation of attitudes."

—Dr. Edmund E. Day, director of social sciences and general education of the General Education Board.

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Nor May the Scheme Step Forth

To one who is planning a course emphasizing the democratic tradition in American literature, the words of Walter Pritchard Eaton in the December "News Letter" bring a challenge. Is it treason to the highest concepts of literary form and art to stress ideas, the continuity of liberal ideas drawn from the deepest feelings and experiences, even though such ideas are not always embodied in recognized masterpieces of "belles lettres"? Professor Eaton refers to "a dreary year" spent by students working over definitions of democracy, the "very essence" of which is "personable and indefinable". Benjamin Franklin's fine letter to David Hartley might be cosidered one of these "dreary definitions" for such a course. In fact, it might be considered part of the "stream of democratic propaganda" which seems to Professor Eaton abhorrent. At the time such revolutionary happenings as the destruction of the Bastille and the plundering of chateaux were occurring in France, Franklin wrote to his friend, a former member of the commission which arranged peace with the United States:

> The convulsions in France are attended with some disagreeable Circumstances; but if by the Struggle she obtains and secures for the Nation its future Liberty, and a good Constitution, a few Years' Enjoyment of those Blessings will amply repair all the Damages their Acquisition may have occasioned. God grant, that not only the Love of Liberty, but a thorough Knowledge of the Rights of Man, may pervade all the Nations of the Earth, so that a Philosopher may set his Foot anywhere on its Surface, and say, "This is my Country."

It is quite possible that soldiers would prefer a copy of Wordsworth or Keats to a collection of writings by Benjamin Franklin, but there is nothing about the interest in one which would exclude an interest in the other. Students are interested to learn that a vigorous young Connecticut lawyer contributed both a literary and a political sensation to London in 1792 with his words called "Advice to the Privileged Orders," advice to the upper classes to gain some sense of community responsibility and learn from the revolution in France how to avoid further upheavals of the kind. Barlow, the man in question, was not primarily a man of letters, yet like Franklin he wrote well, intending in most of his iterary activity, even the famous "Hasty Pudding," to praise the democratic taste and virtues. One recalls that on December 19, 1776, six days before the American army crossed the Delaware to defeat the British at Trenton, a pamphlet called "The American Crisis," by Thomas Paine, appeared in the hands of soldiers. No American today would know or remember that if somewhere along the line he had not learned of Paine in a course of letters.

When I was in Philadelphia last summer, the Fairmont Park Commission refused to allow a statue of Paine to be placed in that city park. It may be that Philadelphia schools give too much time to Wordsworth "in vacant or in pensive mood" and too little time to a distinguished citizen of their city who, Jefferson said, did as much as "any man living" for the cause of freedom.

Another definition which I believe students do not find dreary is Whitman's, written seven years after the close of the Civil War, when American culture was at a low spiritual ebb:

> And, topping democracy, this most alluring record, that it alone can bind, and ever seeks to bind, all nations, all men, of however various and distant lands, into a brotherhood, a family. It is the old, yet ever-modern dream of earth, out of her eldest and her youngest, her fond philosophers and poets. Not that half only, individualism, which isolates. There is another half, which is adhesiveness or love, that fuses, ties and aggregates, making the races comrades, and fraternizing all. Both are to be vitalized by religion, (sole worthiest elevator of man or state,) breathing into the proud, material tissues, the breath of life. For I say at the core of democracy, finally, is the religious element. All the religions, old and new, are there. Nor may the scheme step forth, clothed in resplendent beauty and command, till these, bearing the best, the latest fruit, the spiritual, shall fully appear.

Teachers of Engish are not ashamed as Mr. Eaton thinks, of being "only teachers of English". It is just evident that the interests of all teachers of English do not run in the same channels. The ideas and career and words of Thomas Paine may be made as interesting to young Americans as those of T. S. Eliot, and the words of Barlow, Crevecoeur, Freneau, Walt Whitman, Vachel Lindsay, Carl Sandburg, and others may be taught without hesitation from the viewpoint of that channel of human aspiration we call democracy.

The literature of England and America is too broad and wondrous a world for those who interpret it to strive to limit one another. Like the dispute between the Big Endians and the Little Endians we are all trying to find the meat in the egg, not just admire its contours.

—T. M. Pearce
Univ. of New Mexico

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Why Are We Under Fire?

(Continued from Page One)

dramatic poetry, the Chaucer, the two hours devoted to Emerson only. But practically everyone in college is glad to take a plain four- or six-hour survey course in English literature (limited to the really great authors), and a two- or three-hour survey of American literature and ideals, or better yet, a strong six-hour course in masterpieces of world literature, if—here is the point—such courses are not tiresomely burdened with biographical and critical data concerning forms and tendencies and etymologies, and if they teach students to read with understanding and enjoyment the inspiring and always readable, always profitable, masterpieces of poetry and prose. Many a biology or physics or mathematics major as well as history or social science major wants a sincere introduction to great literature, but he does not see how he can get it. Let us English instructors think less of our own majors and more of our usefulness to majors in other fields.

Let us not limit our advanced composition classes to embryo novelists, poets, and journalists; let us encourage "outsiders" to find help in our English offices even when they are not enrolled in our advanced courses. English composition is really a "tool", a means with which to make something in some other "line". It may shape up a good public address, or business letter, or military report, or anything that a thinking peson may need to communicate orally or in writing to his associates or his posterity.

Literature is for the mass of college students (not the few who aspire to teach English) the best that has been thought and said in the world, the eternally valuable inheritance that preserves the civilization of past ages for the use and enjoyment of future ages. We are very busy today inside and outside collegiate cloisters or compounds. So let us disregard, so far as our students are concerned, the minor fourth-rate writers, even the third and second rate. Let us concentrate on the very best, the very greatest, not only in the English language, but in all languages; let us relate these greatest works of literature to all human interests, such as foreign affairs and politics and ethics and—but that is another story and our 1000-word limit approaches.

If we English teachers want to flourish perennially, in these critical years when Americans must become citizens of the world and extremely useful ones, we must also encourage wholeheartedly the study of other languages and literatures; and for such study a good foundation in our subject is prerequisite. We must advise our able students to learn French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese even Japanese, etc. We must show them the great post-war future for the American linguist. As the United States emerges from its self-sufficiency of isolation, so we English teachers must emerge from our imitation ivory towers.

—Geraldine P. Dilla
Univ. of Kansas City

Semantics

. . . But the English teacher who leads his pupils to analyze the devious ways of propaganda or the blandishments of advertising stands on delicate ground. He may be regarded by interested groups outside the school as a subversive agent, and so may be subjected to particularly unwholesome forms of pressure. No such pressure should stop the teacher, if he likes, from exposing emotional evocation representing itself as knowledge or science. If the motive of the teacher in dealing with examples of propaganda were simply the social motive of forearming the students against its effects there might be debate on the validity of propaganda as material for the English class. But the teacher has in fact a direct professional motive in the use of such material wherever it can further an understanding of the uses and power of language. Yet here again the teacher faces a danger. He must not allow his students to wind up with an impression there is ground for believing that overzealous sematicism too often leaves with them, the impression that all language is hypocrisy, that every man's expression of his belief is "propaganda", that all thinking is rationalization and disguised axe-grinding. Particularly where literature is concerned, the student must not be allowed to feel that the purpose of studying language is to see through it so that one can discount its art and disbelieve its record of experience and aspiration. . . .

—The Training of Secondary School Teachers. Report of a Joint Committee of the Faculty of Harvard College and of the Graduate School of Education. pp. 74-75.

—o—

Realms of Gold

(*In Wartime*)

Fain would I travel in the realms of gold
Where Keats heaped up the gleanings of his brain.
There would I find Ben Jonson rare and bold
And all his sons, likewise the golden chain
That Avon's bard wrought out. Mad Shelley's voice
Would speak sweet tones, and Chaucer pilgrim tale
Renew, grave Milton make L'Allegro's choice,
And Shalott's Lady show her features pale.

But fireside bliss is not for me. From seas
And land and air come crashing sounds, and grief
Spreads wide. Forgotten are Hesperides
And blissful peace; the world is withering leaf.
A dreamer may not dream in time of war;
He fights to save what he but loved before.

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